

C O M M E N T A R I E S



Book Review: *Modalities for Massage and Bodywork*

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Modalities for Massage and Bodywork,^a edited by Elaine Stillerman, LMT, introduces the top twenty-one modalities in massage and bodywork. I had a favorite book, *Bodywork Basics*,⁽¹⁾ which covered many bodywork modalities in brief. Stillerman's book is more detailed. This is not an "introduction to massage" book, but an overview of the top modalities. And each modality is covered in reasonable detail.

Modalities for Massage and Bodywork aims to "identify the modalities that best apply to your clients, incorporate key concepts into your practice, and take the first steps toward specialization all with one helpful text." Each chapter is written in a consistent style by experts in their field. Each chapter has an introduction, history, definition, techniques, indications and contraindications, certification/training, and case history, with resources and questions at the end. Sidebar boxes provide useful information. In some chapters, the authors provide personal "In My Experience" commentary. All-color pages make this book an interesting read. A DVD that shows some techniques for seven of the modalities is also included.

The book starts with Aaron Mattes' Active Isolated Stretching by Joe Muscolino, including a great introduction to the theories of stretching and reciprocal inhibition. Sonia Elisa Masocco writes an excellent introduction to Ayurvedic therapies, certainly a challenge to summarize in twelve pages. Her chapter is followed by cancer massage (Beverly Byers), craniosacral therapy (John Upledger), and geriatric massage (Susan Salvo). Diana Moore writes about infant massage. The chapter on Lomi Lomi is great, clarifying the terms and history, and the one on manual lymphatic drainage (Robert Harris) provides a clear history and techniques based on Dr. Emil Vodder's work, but also lists other methods.

I particularly liked the chapter on myofascial release (Art Riggs and Keith Eric Grant). The history is comprehensive, and the exposition of anatomy and physiology attempts to provide the scientific basis of the technique, a nice balance between art and science.

Judith DeLany authored neuromuscular therapy and trigger point release. These chapters have overlaps,

^a St. Louis, MO: Mosby, Elsevier; 2008. 480 pp. \$57.95. ISBN 032305255X.

but some readers may not agree to lump them together as one. The history is helpful and clarifies the various schools. Leslie Korn describes polarity therapy, which also includes a section on research. Peter Schwind writes on structural integration, which is derived from Ida Rolf's Rolfing. Jack Blackburn on Trager provides a wonderful summary of the work. Laura Norman outlines reflexology, and Terry Norman, *tui na*.

The historical context is always interesting, because it puts into perspective the modality's development. A huge number of "new" techniques appearing today are just slight modifications of established modalities. Some implement a slight twist and name the technique after themselves. *Modalities for Massage and Bodywork* certainly clarifies the field, presenting the top "mainstream" modalities. Of course, not all modalities can be covered—for example, (my wish list) Reiki, Swedish, Feldenkrais, Alexander technique—but you can't have everything.

People currently like to talk about the evidence-based approach, and certainly, in some chapters, the authors try to explain the mechanisms by which the modalities work and to link each modality with research. The problem is that there is still very little scientific research on these mechanisms. Most explanations are based on clinical experiences, hypotheses, and guesses that sometimes lead in the direction of pseudoscience. This difficulty can be seen in the chapter on reflexology, which states certain hypotheses that are known to be myths: the lactic acid hypothesis and nerve receptors. The lactic acid hypothesis has been proved to be a myth, and there is no evidence of direct and unknown connections between certain parts of the feet and hands and the various organs in the body. The text also make various statements that are unsubstantiated or that lack references: "Gravity pulls down toxic waste and build up in the bottom of the feet." "The Chinese have shown that reflexology provides some improvement 95% of the time." A change in the fascia from sol to gel, which was proven unlikely to happen during manual therapy, is still given as the aim of some manual therapies. Recent findings in fascia research by Robert Schleip and others have shown that eliciting such changes by mechanical means is unlikely.⁽²⁾

Another chapter that bothers me is the history of *tui na*. It said that Swedish massage, together with

all forms of massage and manual therapy, are derived from *tui na*. The text said that Per Henrik Ling, the “father” of Swedish massage (we now know that he has nothing to do with the technique⁽³⁾), learned *tui na* from Jesuit priests who brought it from China. This story can be found only in unreferenced articles on the Internet. (Another version said that Ling had a Chinese friend.⁽⁴⁾) This story cannot be found in any reliable source, including in *The History of Massage*.⁽³⁾ My consultation with several experts in the field suggests that the Chinese connection is an invention of Ling’s competitors during his time, in an effort to discredit his work.⁽⁵⁾ Although Ling was probably aware of Chinese massage, he is unique in that he was the first to develop a system of integrated manual therapy, combining physical training and gymnastic procedures with knowledge in anatomy, physiology, and pathology.⁽⁵⁾

My criticism of *Modalities for Massage and Bodywork* is that some of the authors could have put more effort into researching the history and updating current research literature in massage. Despite these snags, the techniques in every chapter are well presented. It is indeed difficult to balance the art and science. For me, this book is useful and worthwhile because it gives a broad picture of the most commonly used modalities in massage. Beginners—or even experienced body-workers—receive a good introduction to modalities of interest, and they can consult the resources listed in the text if they want to pursue those modalities further. Editor Elaine Stillerman is to be congratulated for her hard work in bringing together this wonderful book.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST NOTIFICATION

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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